

ESSAI

Volume 9

Article 21

4-1-2011

The Benefits and Detriments of the No Child Left behind Act

Theresa Kolodziej
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai>

Recommended Citation

Kolodziej, Theresa (2011) "The Benefits and Detriments of the No Child Left behind Act," *ESSAI*: Vol. 9, Article 21.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol9/iss1/21>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. It has been accepted for inclusion in ESSAI by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. For more information, please contact koteles@cod.edu.

The Benefits and Detriments of the No Child Left Behind Act

by Theresa Kolodziej

(Education 1100)

Abstract

This paper explores positive and negative features within and surrounding the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB requires that all students of any race, gender, and ability level to excel in reading and math by 2014 and that schools should build up to that goal by measuring achievement. There are many criticisms of NCLB but there are some instances of NCLB actually helping to improve achievement scores. One topic explored is NCLB's "highly qualified teacher" requirement. Specifically, whether its definition of a highly qualified teacher is a good one. Another issue addressed is NCLB's use of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as a measurement for achievement. Critics say that it is an inaccurate measurement. If a school fails to meet AYP multiple times, it is required to restructure the system; this paper also addresses if restructuring methods are effective. The paper also focuses on the importance AYP places on minority students that has given much needed attention to these students who need better quality education. Overall, the paper highlights the positive and negative aspects of NCLB to bring attention towards the need to mend the act.

During his first term, former President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law on January 8th, 2002. A revision to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the purpose of NCLB is to have all American students become proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. Under the law, individual states set the standard that public school students must reach. This standard applies to all students including English Language Learners and special education students. Schools must reach the standard set by the state and move on to reach a higher goal, termed "Adequate Yearly Progress." Standardized tests for students measure this progress. All schools must publish scores for the public; if a school fails to meet the goals set, parents are allowed the ability to move students to a better school. If a school continuously fails to meet the state's goal, the school system must be improved using various methods including, the use of tutoring programs, summer school, and the restructuring of the entire system (CQ Press, 2005, p. 473). Also under NCLB, teachers are required to be "highly qualified." The law requires that all new teachers meet a high set of standards (Irons & Harris, 2007, p. 33). The goals and requirements set by NCLB are, without a doubt, a noble intention to improve the education of all students: NCLB "holds [public] schools...accountable for raising the achievement of all students, particularly those with disabilities, those from low-income families and racial and ethnic minorities, and those with limited English proficiency" (CQ Press, 2005, p. 469). NCLB, while popular in the beginning, has garnered many criticisms, such as the focus on standardized testing and high quality teachers. These criticisms do not prove NCLB is not without strong points; in some ways it does help to improve the scores of certain subgroups of students and has brought American education into the spotlight. However, the act's faults must be revised in order to accomplish the goals originally desired by NCLB, and many revisions have already been suggested.

According to No Child Left Behind, teachers must be labeled as "highly qualified." "To satisfy the highly qualified standard of NCLB, each teacher of a core subject must hold a bachelor's degree and a state standard teaching credential, as well as demonstrate knowledge of the subject taught" (Irons & Harris, 2007, p. 33). Having well-educated and qualified teachers is necessary for education since they directly interact with the students NCLB wants to help. Most would agree that

this standard is an important goal. However, there are some criticisms to this notion of highly qualified teachers.

The first criticism of highly qualified teachers is where the teachers eventually work. No Child Left Behind brings attention to the children of low-income families. Many of the “good” teachers, however, do not work at these schools with a majority of said students. “The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools published a report...that showed that inexperienced teachers were more likely to teach in high-poverty schools” (Irons & Harris, 2007, p. 38). High-poverty schools need the help an experienced and effective teacher can give, yet better pay is more prominent in well-to-do school districts, enticing good teachers to work there. One solution to this problem was a pilot program initiated by the state of Virginia. Pay incentives were offered to experienced teachers in order to bring more teachers to work in under-performing schools (Irons & Harris, 2007, p. 38). Solutions similar to Virginia’s program are necessary to improve the education provided at high-poverty schools.

Another criticism revolving around highly qualified teachers is the worry over the actual education training. An opponent to the definition of a “highly qualified” teacher, college professor Funmi A. Amobi, suggests, “there is more to high quality teaching than subject matter and the possession of ‘best practices’” (Amobi, 2006, p. 23-4). In addition to subject training, prospective teachers need to be introspective in order “to personalize and own the craft of teaching” (Amobi, 2006, p. 34) in order to be a great teacher. This lesson on introspection needs to be emphasized in teacher training and not to be overshadowed by teaching core subjects and standard teaching methods. Amobi proposes that the definition of a highly qualified teacher needs to be redefined to place further emphasis on what makes a great teacher along with being a knowledgeable one (Amobi, 2006, p. 24).

A major issue surrounding No Child Left Behind is the concept of Adequate Yearly Progress. AYP reports are used to determine whether a school meets the standard applied by the entire state; thus meaning whether the school’s students are achieving. Some critics argue AYP has a fundamental problem. The American Federation of Teachers is one such critic, believing that

AYP does not measure the *same* students over time...so it is not a progress measure at all time in any given year....Because AYP does not measure progress, it cannot discern whether or not a school has the requisite annual percentage of proficient students. (Fisanick, 2008, p. 30-1)

Since AYP may not accurately measure progress and/or achievement, the entire system can become corrupted. AYP would need to be altered in order to achieve its purpose. The unreliability of the current system may be unfair to schools; schools that fail to meet AYP must be restructured in some way, especially if a school failed to meet it repeatedly.

No Child Left Behind’s logic holds schools responsible for student education; change the school, change the education. NCLB requires that if a school fails to meet AYP, credible or not, students must be allowed to transfer to a better school. A school “in need of improvement” for three consecutive years must provide tutoring, summer school, and after-school programs; after four years, the school must be restructured (CQ Press, 2005, p. 473). Recently, the U.S. Department of Education has favored certain methods of restructuring schools, including “closing [the school]...and sending students elsewhere; handing it over to a[n]...outside entity to run; replacing most of the staff; [and]...changes in...curriculum” (Gewertz, 2009, n.p.). This restructuring is needed in many schools: “more than 5,000 schools were in restructuring in 2008-2009...up from 2,300 two years earlier” (Gewertz, 2009, n.p.). Many critics argue that the methods favored by the government are not effective at improving schools. One single answer is thought not to be effective. In a study conducted by the Center of Education Policy, it was found that

versions of those approaches [have] not wielded much success among the schools, districts, and states...studied...All schools examined found that multiple, coordinated strategies were needed to improve achievement enough...to ‘exit’ restructuring, and that those strategies needed to be revised as the work proceeded” (Gewertz, 2009, n.p.).

Many schools had adopted methods suggested by NCLB but added new ideas as well in order to improve. However, this is not to say that NCLB’s guidelines have not been effective. “Most of the schools that got out of restructuring...had replaced staff members...and... it helped improve things in some cases” (Gewertz, 2009, n.p.). Although it is not perfect, restructuring has had some impact. Like the idea of a highly qualified teacher, NCLB’s restructuring plan is a well-intended plan that needs improvement and refinement to achieve the goal originally planned.

AYP not only assesses the student body as a whole, but also various subgroups of students. AYP places a spotlight on minority students, bringing much needed attention to the education of student subgroups. These subgroups include “those with learning disabilities, low-income students, students from all racial and ethnic groups, and students with limited English proficiency” (Irons & Harris, 2007, p. 21). This necessity to include the subgroups has forced schools to increase attention and effort towards these students.

English Language Learners are one of the aforementioned subgroups. NCLB has drawn more attention to ELLs with a goal to lessen the achievement gap between ELLs and majority students. Due to this newfound attention, combined with the necessity of highly qualified teachers, teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) has become a more professional field (Price & Peterson, 2009, p. 68). This allows more effective teachers to improve support towards ELLs. However, a major issue for ELLs and NCLB is the testing that is required. States without alternative testing ask ELL students “to compete with native speakers while lacking native speaker language proficiency” (Price & Peterson, 2009, p. 68), which makes passing the test unlikely and skews the final AYP results. Refinement is needed to support ELL students.

Special education students are another subgroup that had been previously overlooked. Like ELLs, testing students in special education is difficult; NCLB requires 95% of a school’s population to be tested, which includes subgroups like special education students (Fisanick, 2008, p. 63). This proves somewhat difficult for analyzing special education students’ achievement scores, since this test-attendance goal is sometimes not met for the subgroup (Fisanick, 2008, p. 64). However, the students who are actually tested have shown improvement through NCLB. “From 2000-2001 to 2002-2003, 14 of 20 states experienced an increase...of 4th-grade special education students performing at or above...proficient level and 16 of 20...an increase in math” (Fisanick, 2008, p. 66). Further data, however, are necessary to prove that NCLB fully helps special education students improve.

The No Child Left Behind Act is not perfect, yet not wholly flawed either. The purpose behind the act is to improve the education of all American students, noble, to say the least. Some of NCLB’s aspects work, particularly its focus to improve the education of minority students. Other aspects do not including, how achievement is measured, how schools are restructured, and what makes a teacher highly qualified. Other parts of NCLB have also gathered strong criticisms including, the use of a single test to measure achievement, and the shift of curriculum from liberal arts to reading and writing, the focus of NCLB. The most important aspect of NCLB, however, is that it has brought attention to the state of education in its entirety. With a major debate surrounding No Child Left Behind, its faults can eventually be corrected to literally leave no child behind in education.

References

- Amobi, F. (Spring 2006). Beyond the Call: Preserving reflection in the preparation of “highly qualified” teachers. *Teachers Education Quarterly*. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/backvols/2006/33_2/09amobi.pdf
- CQ Press. (2005). No Child Left Behind: Is the law improving student performance? *The CQ Researcher*, 15(20), 473.
- Fisanick, C. (Ed.). (2008). *Has No Child Left Behind been good for education?* Farmington Hills, MN: Greenhaven Press.
- Gewertz, C. (2009). Restructuring under NCLB found lacking. *Education Week* 29(15), n.pg.
- Irons, J.E., & Harris, S. (2007). *The challenges of No Child Left Behind: Understanding the issues of excellence, accountability, and choice*. Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
- Price, T. A., & Peterson, E. (Eds.). (2009). *The myth and reality of No Child Left Behind: Public education and high stakes assessment: A report issued on behalf of National-Louis University, 2008*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.